

CHAPTER 8

Downtown & Riverfront Master Plan 2000

Introduction

The City of Lynchburg, in conjunction with Lynch's Landing, engaged Sasaki Associates to develop the Downtown and Riverfront Master Plan. The Master Plan was adopted by the Lynchburg City Council in May 2001, and is incorporated in this Comprehensive Plan by reference.

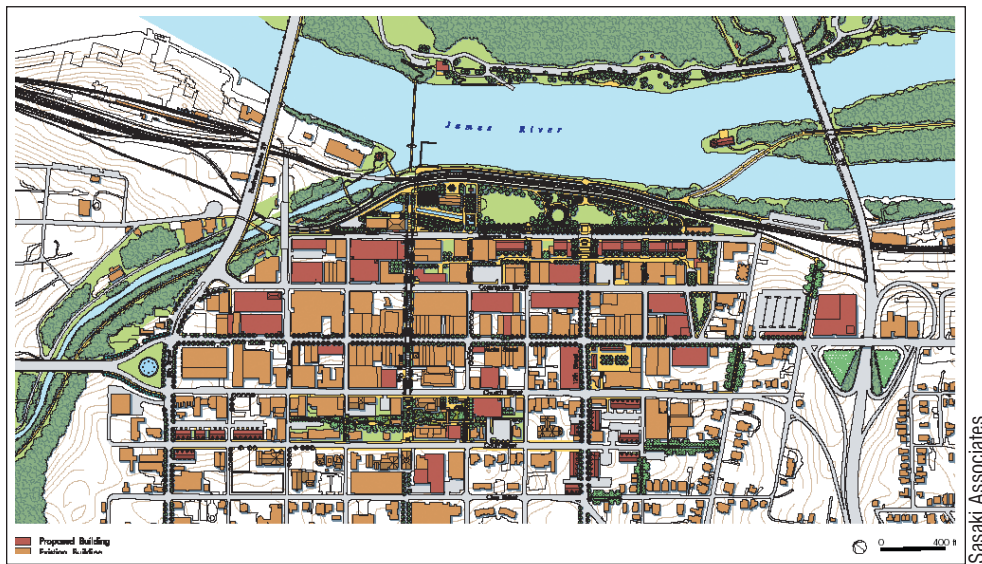
The Downtown and Riverfront Master Plan covers the area of Lynchburg from the US Route 29 Expressway to Fifth Street (US Business Route 29), and from Clay Street to the riverfront. The surrounding neighborhoods, while not covered directly by the Master Plan, are central to the success of the Downtown and include Daniel's Hill, Garland Hill, College Hill, Federal Hill, and Diamond Hill. Across the James River, Amherst County has designed park improvements for the north bank of the river that will greatly enhance the visibility of the Lynchburg side. For the Downtown to succeed, the historic core of the City must be viewed within the context of the region, serving the needs of residents, businesses, and visitors by offering unique uses in the areas of culture, entertainment, housing, retail, and professional and governmental services.

Several factors preceded the Master Plan and led to its development:

- Existing riverfront festivals and events created and managed by Lynch's Landing.
- Riverfront improvement concepts prepared by LDR International, Inc.
- Existing pedestrian and bicycle access to Percival's Island; added parking and streetscape improvements in the immediate area; and the ongoing design and construction of the James River Heritage Trail, including the extension into Amherst County.
- The opening of Amazement Square in March 2001, a children's museum on the riverfront.
- The success of the existing Community Market.
- An Army Corps of Engineers study, led by Wiley & Wilson Engineers, of a sewer interceptor to replace the combined sewer overflow along a seven-mile stretch of the James River (CSO Study).
- The need for direction and policies to address historic preservation goals, while providing additional parking in key downtown locations.
- The potential for a new Federal Courthouse.
- Downtown Lynchburg's unique identity and two-hundred-year history, including the extensive investments made in infrastructure, buildings, civic institutions, businesses, and private residences.

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While these conditions were readily apparent at the time work began on the Master Plan, the Downtown also faced a number of other issues that are addressed in the Master Plan. There are a sizable number of vacant historic buildings in the Downtown that affect the pedestrian environment and public perception of the Downtown. Even though a number of new restaurants and businesses have opened in the Downtown in the last year or two, there is still no critical mass of commercial office, retail, housing, or entertainment establishments. The Riverfront has become a popular place for concerts and festivals. Over time, the programming of this space needs to evolve to be compatible with open space improvements and new development. Finally, the image and function of the Downtown will be greatly improved by a coherent and attractive signage system that highlights gateways, identifies key destinations, and interprets historic and environmental features.



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Context & Recommendations

A number of opportunities will contribute to Downtown development. In addition to the Downtown's rich history, the adjoining neighborhoods, the City as a whole, and the region offer many complementary historic resources that could attract a tourist base. The proximity to regional natural and recreational attractions also provides a high quality of life that gives Lynchburg a competitive advantage over other locations. Even though the City is not located on an interstate, it has good highway access and an airport. In addition, several colleges and universities are located in and around Lynchburg. With the James River adjacent to the downtown, that part of the City can become the nexus for regional trail systems and urban waterfront activities.

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Revitalization of the Downtown and the Riverfront is not without challenges, however. Downtown is struggling to compete with the City's suburbs, where retail, industry, and corporate businesses have relocated. With more vacant, available land, residential preferences have shifted toward the outskirts, although a committed group of residents are reclaiming and improving the historic neighborhoods adjacent to the Downtown. Attracting additional residents to the Downtown is one of the City's goals. Filling the extensive Downtown vacancies will involve a significant change in perception for people to realize the advantages of the culture, recreation, and history of the Downtown environment. The plan for the Downtown and the Riverfront must address the remaining industrial uses, including active rail lines along the riverbank and truck routes that traverse the Downtown area. Parking demand in the Downtown area must be satisfied to meet tenant requirements, particularly for office space, without destroying the architectural fabric of the Downtown. The steep grades along the bluffs create wonderful opportunities for scenic views, but they restrict pedestrian access, making connections between Downtown and the Riverfront a special challenge. Planning for the Riverfront must contend with the 100-year floodplain and the design and construction schedule for the proposed sewer interceptor.

An implementation strategy is integral to the Comprehensive Plan and includes several early-action projects that will signal public interest in Downtown. At the same time, the Comprehensive Plan establishes a long-term direction for the Downtown area in order to provide a framework for decision making as implementation proceeds. The City will have to focus its efforts on a few strategic projects that will make a significant impact, setting the stage for subsequent private investment. From the outset, the Ninth Street corridor and the Riverfront have been designated as high-priority improvement projects, and economic development has been a priority objective.

Goals, Objectives & Strategies

The following goals, objectives and strategies are drawn from the Downtown & Riverfront Master Plan 2000, to illustrate actions necessary to implement that plan. The reader is encouraged to review that Master Plan for detailed information and recommendations for the Downtown and Riverfront areas.

Goal 1. Continue to reach consensus on major policy initiatives in order to realize the improvements recommended in the Downtown & Riverfront Master Plan 2000.

Objective 1.A. Leveraging Investment. Ensure that public investment in capital improvements and public amenities reinforces downtown's role as a viable address in the regional marketplace and effectively leverages private investment.

- 1) Focus public investment in new infrastructure to leverage subsequent private investment.
- 2) Build on the strengths of existing entities, rather than embark on new endeavors.

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- 3) Maximize opportunities for private investment with public investments that are strategic in location and scale.
- 4) Maximize opportunities for federal and state funding for civic improvements.
- 5) Recognize that Downtown investment benefits the entire region.
- 6) Invest in high-quality design and materials to distinguish Downtown streets and parks.

Objective 1.B. Niche in the Regional Market. Clarify and strengthen downtown's role in the regional economy.

- 1) Promote Downtown as the regional center for government, professional services, and financial services.
- 2) Promote Downtown as the regional center for the arts, culture, entertainment, specialized shopping, and large-scale events.
- 3) Promote the Downtown as an appealing place to live.

Objective 1.C. Property Disposition and Acquisition. Continue to sell certain City-owned property in the Downtown area, while maintaining or acquiring some strategic properties to ensure that Downtown development follows the Master Plan.

- 1) Sell or redevelop the following properties per the Master Plan:
 - a) N & W Depot (10 Ninth Street): Sell building to the private sector for rehabilitation for a mix of uses.
 - b) Conner Produce Building (12 Ninth Street): Demolish building for a park.
 - c) Pride of Virginia Meats Building (1000 Jefferson Street): Demolish for a park or sell to private sector for rehabilitation for retail use or housing.
 - d) The Switching Station (near Blackwater Creek): Relocate building to new park and use for retail or City function.
 - e) James T. Davis Building (1225 Main Street): Sell building to the private sector for rehabilitation for a mix of uses.
 - f) The Old Tobacco Warehouse (1301 Main Street): Sell building to the private sector for rehabilitation for a mix of uses.
 - g) Piggly Wiggly Building (1307 Main Street): Sell building to the private sector for rehabilitation for a mix of uses.
- 2) Acquire the following strategic properties for Downtown redevelopment:
 - a) 1100 Block of Main Street: For ice rink or other appropriate development.
 - b) 1000 Church Street: For parking garage.

Objective 1.D. Existing and Proposed Historic Districts. Consider designation of the Downtown and Riverfront as a local historic district in order to prevent further demolition and incompatible new construction.

Objective 1.E. Downtown Foundation. Create a foundation that would provide a tax-deductible vehicle for the private sector, individuals, and philanthropic groups to contribute to the Downtown and Riverfront revitalization effort.

Goal 2. Lead the Downtown redevelopment effort by investing in public infrastructure and participating in catalyst projects.

Objective 2.A. Public Sector Initiatives. Undertake those infrastructure projects necessary to promote private development in the Downtown.

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- 1) Begin sewer separation in the middle portion of the Ninth Street Corridor, working with the Army Corps of Engineers CSO Study.
- 2) Secure funding and complete the design for the Ninth Street improvements.
- 3) Complete the renovation of the Human Services facilities at the J.W. Ould Building.
- 4) Design the Monument Terrace improvements and use public investment to leverage private funds to support renovation.
- 5) Work with the GSA to provide site improvements for the new Federal Courthouse downtown.
- 6) Begin truck route improvements with a signalized intersection at Main Street and Washington Street, with long-term planning for an extension of Commerce Street.
- 7) Secure funding and begin the construction of the pedestrian bridge at Blackwater Creek.
- 8) Acquire key properties, especially for walks along bluffs.
- 9) Prepare signage scheme/design for the entire downtown and complete installation at key locations (gateways, key tourism destinations, and public parking garages).

Goal 3. Use design principles as the framework for moving forward and building on the great strengths and assets of the Downtown.

Objective 3.A. Circulation and Accessibility. Concentrate on improving and expanding retail businesses, street-level activities, and streetscape environments.

- 1) Create a Downtown Walking Loop along Ninth Street, Main Street, Twelfth Street, and Jefferson Street.
- 2) Establish a system of stairs and bluff walks that emphasizes the stunning topography, views, and historic resources from the top of the hills down to the Riverfront.
- 3) Strengthen pedestrian connections among the historic neighborhoods, Downtown, and the river.
- 4) Extend the residential fabric from the historic neighborhoods into the heart of Downtown.
- 5) Implement the James Riverwalk as recommended in Section 2.5 of the Downtown & Riverfront Master Plan 2000.

Objective 3.B. Celebrating the Historic Riverfront. Interpret the City's founding at the ferry crossing and the 19th Century industrial development around the Kanawha Canal, and incorporate this history into site improvements, civic institutions, new housing, and programming.

Objective 3.C. Gateways. Define gateways and create a sequence of arrival experiences for visitors leading from the bridges and regional highways to the Downtown streets, parking, sidewalks, and key destinations.

Objective 3.D. Integrated Approach. Develop a strategy that balances programmed activities, park design, and economic development over time, with initial energies focused on programmed activities and long-term efforts focused on capital investment.



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